

Afghanistan

August 28, 2006

Freedom

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan

ch

**Chosin Soldiers patrol
northeastern Afghanistan**

Pages 14, 15

Army Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan commander, speaks with officials during his tour of the military medical education center and hospital Aug. 14.

Photo by Army Sgt. Carina M. Garcia
345th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment



Cover: Army Spec. Kevin Bartlett, a mortarman with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan, from Evansville, Ind., and Army Pfc. Travis Domine, also a mortarman with HHC, 1-32 Inf., from Tracey, Minn., cross a shallow stretch of the Waygal River on Aug. 4 near the town of Bella, located in Nuristan Province.

Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro
Task Force Spartan public affairs

Contents

Page 3: Afghan currency helps stabilize economy

Page 4: Rescue team receives recognition

Page 6: X-ray machine upgrades postal safety

Page 7: Task Force Gauntlet Soldiers help ANP

Page 8: Active-duty, Reserve Airmen keep A-10s soaring ►



Page 10: Bagram A-10s surge for summer offensive

Page 12: Mission makes medic learn more about himself

Page 13: Soldiers offered citizenship opportunity



Page 14: Chosin Soldiers patrol northeastern Afghanistan ►

Afghanistan Freedom Watch

Freedom Watch is a weekly publication of
Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan.

CFC-A Commander Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry
Public Affairs Officer Col. Thomas Collins

Freedom Watch, an Army publication, is published each Monday by the 19th Public Affairs Detachment at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Printed circulation is 5,000 copies per week.

In accordance with AR-360-1, this Army newspaper is an authorized publication for members of the U.S. military overseas.

Contents of the *Freedom Watch* are not necessarily the official view of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Army.

Deadline for submissions is 0730 Zulu each Friday. All submissions are subject to editing by the 19th Public Affairs Detachment, located in Bldg. 415, Room 205, Bagram Airfield. We can be reached at DSN 318-231-3338.

Freedom Watch Staff

Commander - Capt. Jim Bono

NCOIC/Editor - Sgt. 1st Class

Ken McCooey

Journalists -

Cpl. Tremeshia Ellis

Spc. James Tamez

Pfc. Anna Perry

Pfc. Michael Nyeste

***Visit the CFC-A Web site at
www.cfc-a.centcom.mil***

Click on the *Freedom Watch* link on the homepage to view the *Freedom Watch*.

Afghan currency helps stabilize economy

**By Army Spc.
Robert Honeycutt**
**345th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment**

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- U.S. Soldiers in Afghanistan frequently buy Afghanis, the Afghan currency, as a souvenir at the local bazaars. However, the history of the currency of this country escapes most people. Some Soldiers are led to believe this money may be of some value now or in the future.

"The money you buy at the bazaar cannot be traded for U.S. dollars," said Army Lt. Andrea Darling, disbursing officer of the 10th Soldier Support Battalion from Fort Drum, N.Y. "Someone brought in a 10,000 bill, which is not a current bill. They try to exchange it, but there is nothing we can do."

Though Afghani is the name of the currency currently used in Afghanistan, it is also the name of the old currency. Afghanistan

has re-established its monetary system in recent years, depreciating the value of the old currency, making it worthless. To differentiate between the old and new bills, a silver strip was added to the new Afghanis; however, this isn't the first time that Afghanistan has reorganized its currency.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Afghans used gold, silver and copper coins that were actually produced for British India. It wasn't until 1891 that Afghanistan got its first currency, the Afghan Rupee.

In 1925, the Rupee was replaced by the Afghani and given the ISO 4217, or world currency code, of AFA, officially naming it the Afghan Afghani.

During years of civil war, warlords, political parties and forgers produced Afghanis with no regulations. By 2002, there were over 15 trillion Afghanis in circulation in the country. This caused the

See MONEY, Page 5



Photo by Army Spc. Robert Honeycutt

Army 1st Lt. Andrea Darling, disbursing officer with the 10th Soldier Support Battalion, Fort Drum, N.Y., prepares to pay a local contractor with Afghan Afghanis.

Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week



Afghan cultural tidbit

Congratulations

Dari

Tabriq
(Tah-bree-ck)

Pashtu

Mu baraksha
(Moo bah-rock-shaw)

Photo by Army Pfc. Michael J. Nyeste

Nearly 6 million Afghan children are enrolled in school. More than 48.5 million textbooks have been printed and distributed nationwide in Dari and Pashto for grades 1-12. Additionally, more than 10,496 teachers have been trained in modern teaching methods. Over 170,000 over-aged students are enrolled in accelerated learning classes and for the first time have an opportunity to obtain an education.

Coalition rescue, recovery team recognized

By Army Sgt.
Stephanie van Geete
Task Force Falcon public
affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Twenty-one U.S. Soldiers and Airmen were recognized Aug. 15 by the government of Turkmenistan for their efforts in recovering a Turkmenistan Red Cross helicopter that crashed in eastern Afghanistan earlier this year.

Aman Yaranov, the Turkmenistan ambassador to Afghanistan, thanked the troops for their actions in a ceremony here.

"On behalf of the Turkmenistan people and Turkmenistan government, I want to thank Bagram Airfield, its officers and the crew members for this operation," Yaranov said. "We know it wasn't your main task, (but) you responded to our request with professionalism and dignity. Without your participation, this operation would not have been possible."



Photos by Army Sgt. Stephanie van Geete

Task Force Centaur Commander Army Lt. Col. William Metheny (left) accepts a plaque of appreciation on behalf of the base commander Aug. 15 from Turkmenistan Ambassador Aman Yuranov.

The Turkmenistan Airlines MI-8 HIP went down Jan. 20, carrying seven international aid workers on their way to Turkmenabad, Turkmenistan, after a humanitarian mission to

earthquake-stricken Pakistan. Transportation officials from Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan had been searching for the helicopter since it went missing, but did not find

the crash site until June 1.

Because of the location of the downed helicopter, on the side of a steep mountain at 12,800 feet elevation, recovery

See AWARD, Page 5

Enduring Voices

What are you doing to keep your fellow service members focused on the mission?



**Army Sgt.
Brian Dolan**

Bagram Airfield

"I keep reiterating the finer points of their mission."



**Army Sgt.
Sara Johnson**

FOB Salerno

"I talk to them and make sure that they don't have any issues that would take away their focus."



**Air Force Master Sgt.
Ronald Brooker**

Bagram Airfield

"Keep them focused on their routine."



**Navy Petty Officer 1st
Class Steven Zezulka**

Bagram Airfield

"Provide them MWR services, clean laundry and water."

AWARD, from Page 4

efforts required a specialized team. Turkmen officials turned to Combined Joint Task Force-76 for help.

Army Maj. Eric Benson, Task Force Centaur executive officer, was the CJTF-76 Rescue Coordination Center director at the time.

"Once we were officially asked to perform this mission, we alerted our rescue team and began detailed planning within the organization," Benson said. "It took us 48 hours from mission receipt to completion."

Task Force Centaur provided the air transportation for the rescue operation, sending a

UH-60 Blackhawk and a CH-47 Chinook to transport the recovery team and remains. Because of the high-altitude and dangerous location of the crash site, Lt. Col. William Metheny, Task Force Centaur commander, called the mission "complex and risky."

"We sent some of our most experienced aircrews, who knew exactly what the aircraft were capable of and their limitations," Metheny said. "It was amazing to watch them come together, put their heads into it and figure out the things that needed to be done, and creative solutions to overcome some of the obstacles for that particular site. It wasn't something that was just planned at the headquarters level and handed down; it was those crew members themselves bringing their experience and expertise."

This recovery mission was the first high-altitude, high-risk mission Task Force Centaur has completed in theater. Although missions like this are not what the Task Force came here focused to do, Metheny said he and his troops are happy to help any way they can.

"Our crews know they bring such a wide capability of skills that they could be asked to do

anything," Metheny said. "I have no problem doing the missions that we're given, that we plan and train for, because our troops truly are very selfless, and will accomplish whatever they possibly can to help any members of the Coalition."

At the ceremony, Metheny accepted a plaque of appreciation from Yaranov on behalf of the base commander.

"We are sad for you, your country and your loss, but honored that we were asked to do the mission and have the opportunity to help your country and the families who lost their loved ones," he told Yaranov.

Benson agreed, saying, "We were all honored to be able to bring closure for seven families in Turkmenistan."

Benson said the fact that Turkmenistan officials made a special trip "to look our aircrew members in the face and thank them" meant a lot to every Soldier that participated.

In addition to helping the families of the deceased, Benson said he hopes the U.S. role in the recovery mission sends a positive message to the international community.

"The U.S. is over here doing good things in Afghanistan," he said.



Turkmenistan ambassador to Afghanistan, Aman Yuranov, thanks members of a CJTF-76 rescue team in a ceremony at Bagram Airfield.

MONEY, from Page 3

exchange rate to depreciate to 43,000 AFA per U.S. dollar.

Khan, a local contractor, remembers trading in a U.S. bill for the old Afghanis.

"I traded a 100 and got 3 million Afghanis," said Khan. "I stuffed both my pockets and still had a lot to carry."

With economic problems and the instability of the Afghan currency, locals frequently used Pakistan Rupees and U.S. dollars.

"People used Pakistan Rupees because it was very hard to carry around and count all the Afghanis," said Khan. "Even now,

many deals are made in Pakistan Rupees."

The new democratic Afghan government made an attempt to restructure the monetary system and introduced a new Afghan currency in late 2002.

Da Afghanistan Bank, which is responsible for all the money handling and banking in the country, issued the new currency.

The new Afghan currency was given a new world currency code of AFN. Da Afghanistan Bank traded out the old Afghanis for the new currency over a three-month period that ended in January 2003.

During this exchange, a new Afghan currency was issued for every 1,000 old Afghanis. After

the exchange period, the old currency became completely worthless.

The finance office in Kandahar Airfield pays many local workers with Afghanis.

"We encourage the Afghanis," said Darling. "It helps boost and stabilize their economy."

More locals are increasingly using the Afghanis. Regulations are now in effect for shopkeepers to post prices in Afghanis and it has appreciated in the last year.

"People are using it a lot more at the market," Khan said. "The value of the Afghanis is higher than the Pakistan Rupee."

Kandahar post office receives X-ray machine, helps ensure safety of home-bound priority mail

By Army Sgt.
Mayra Kennedy
345th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan – Nine U.S. camps in Afghanistan now have DHL's Rapiscan 527 X-ray machine to guarantee that priority mail gets home safe.

With the lowest percentage of contraband incidents in the country, the postal team emphasized how scanning all outgoing mail is a must in the theater of operations.

"The machine shows in detail where these (contraband) items are so that we can retrieve them," said Army Chief Warrant Officer Paul Dziegielewski, from Pittsburgh, PA., postal officer in charge of the 23th Adjutant General Postal Company here. "It has improved the efficiency at the post office, but it also



Photo by Army's Sgt. Mayra Kennedy

DHL's Rapiscan 527 X-ray machine was recently brought to Kandahar Airfield's post office for screening of outgoing mail to prevent any contraband from being shipped back to the U.S.

double checks anything that we may have missed."

Gopal Sunwar, DHL Rapiscan technician, explained how this X-ray machine requires a trained eye.

"If you're a professional, you can identify anything," he said. "The volume of radiation is very high and this allows me identify sensitive items."

He explained that some items are identified by shape, but the color on the X-ray screen can categorize items by type.

"All metals are blue, plastic items are green and leather or clothing look orange," Sunwar said. "If there is a bullet in a box, a technician can identify it by the unique color on the tip and end of the bullet."

Items like ammunition, knives and handguns, to include toy guns, are considered non-mailable items according to post office regulations.

"If we find something ques-

tionable, we open the box before it goes out," said Army Master Sgt. Ratana Purapiromouan, postal supervisor and non-commissioned officer in charge, from Fort Washington, Md. "We actually found a grenade in a package. In those cases we send out a Postal Network Alert and contact the military police and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Control team to destroy the contraband."

Purapiromouan commented that the main purpose for using this X-ray machine is to insure safety, but Soldiers need to be aware and careful about the items shipped, especially if these could cause harm.

"I think that this machine makes it safer for us to send things in the mail, especially when they are sent back home," she said.



Army Spc. Shanita Harris and Staff Sgt. Andrew Palisin of the 23th Adjutant General Postal Company, load the mail on the table to be scanned by DHL'S Rapiscan 527 X-ray machine.

Task Force Gauntlet Soldiers spin wrenches in Kapisa

**By Army Pfc.
Anna K. Perry**
*345th Mobile Public Affairs
Detachment*

KAPISA, Afghanistan -- Mechanics assigned to Task Force Gauntlet gathered up their tools for a visit to the Kapisa Afghan National Police station Aug. 17 with the intention of getting the station's old vehicles up and running again.

The ANP asked the TF Gauntlet members to provide mechanical assistance. The ANP has nine UAZ Russian Jeeps that need maintenance, said Army Chief Warrant Officer Keith Arthur, battalion maintenance officer for the 10th Mountain Division Special Troops Battalion.

Arthur said his troops were more than happy to come to the aid of the ANP.

"They can't just throw the (vehicles) away or buy something new," Arthur said. "They have to work with what they have and these vehicles are all they have."

After consulting vehicle manuals to gain an understanding of the jeep, Arthur's team was prepared to spin their wrenches.

The mechanics were able to get three of the nine vehicles operating during their first visit to the police station. The trucks mostly needed basic maintenance, like batteries, fuel and belts.

"Our goal is to get every one of these running for them," said Arthur. "This process is going to take



Photos by Army Pfc. Anna K. Perry

Army Chief Warrant Officer Keith Arthur inspects a Russian vehicle in Kapisa. Arthur and a group of mechanics from Task Force Gauntlet helped Kapisa Afghan National Police fix three vehicles.

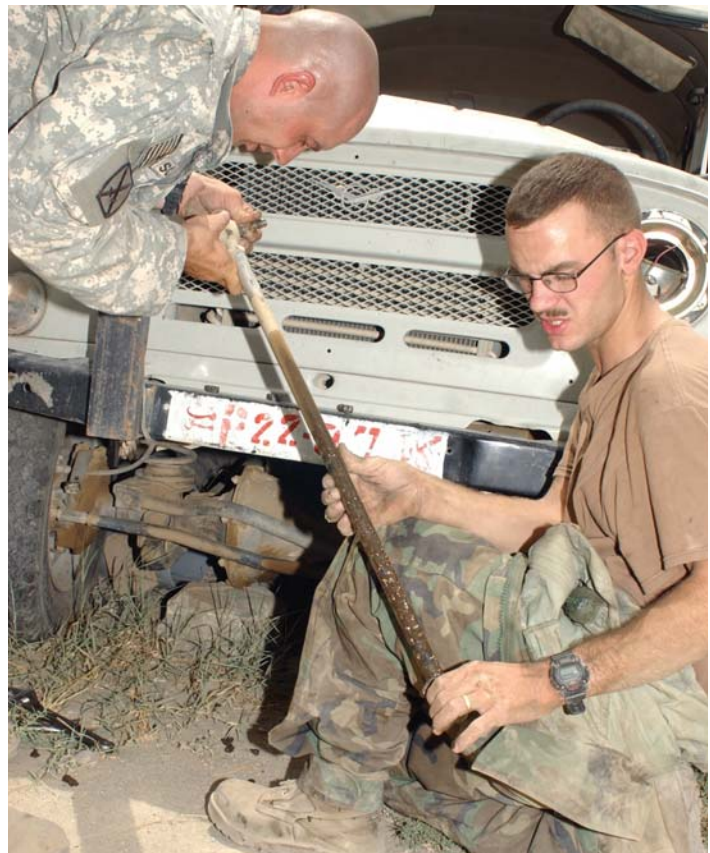
some time, however."

In the future, Arthur's team won't just fix the vehicles on the ground; they'll bring parts back to their shop for extra attention.

Additionally, the team is preparing to establish a mentorship program, which would allow the ANP to train with the mechanics on Bagram, Arthur said.

For the moment, however, the ANP members are content with the day's work.

"We are very appreciative of the Coalition forces helping us fix the vehicles. This will greatly benefit security in this location," said Rajab Khan, chief of mechanics for the police station. "The police always like working and learning with the Coalition and would like to continue to do so."



Army Sgt. Michael Schobey and Army Spc. Bradley Schlottman inspect part of a Russian vehicle in Kapisa.



An A-10 Thunderbolt II from the 81st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron here takes on fuel from a KC-135 Stratotanker from the 22nd Expeditionary Air Refueling Squadron over Afghanistan.



Capt. Rick Mitchell, an A-10 pilot from the 81st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, prepares for flight at Whiteman Air Force Base.

A-10 squadron at Bagram melds active-duty, Reserve

By Air Force Maj. David Kurle
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs
BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan --

This summer's rotation of A-10 pilots here is almost a half-and-half mix of active duty from the 81st Fighter Squadron based at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, and Air Force Reservists from the 303rd FS at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo.

Both sets of pilots have come together as a single team to employ the A-10 in the close air support role it was made for, protecting U.S. and Coalition forces on the ground in the fight against extremists in Afghanistan.

The active-duty pilots tend to be younger, with less time in the A-10, while the Reserve pilots are more seasoned.

"I relied heavily on the Reservists' experience to help my younger pilots gain combat experience," said Air Force Col. Keith McBride, commander of the 81st EFS, and also a squadron commander back at his home base of Spangdahlem.

To foster a single team, he added the two units' numbers together and took to calling the unit the 384th EFS.

"It doesn't really matter if you're an active-duty guy or a Reserve guy," said Col. Tony Johnson, the 455th Expeditionary

Operations Group commander here and a reservist from the 442nd. "An A-10 pilot no matter where you go."

Another common trait to all A-10 pilots is the extensive training in the aircraft, which is the only one of its kind, specially designed for its primary mission of close air support.

"It's amazing how the training we do at home has been validated by the execution of the mission here," said Capt. Rick Mitchell, an A-10 pilot from the 442nd. "Our training at home is so intense that it really serves us well here."

(Editor's note: For more on Bagram's A-10s, please see page 10.)





An A-10 Thunderbolt II pilot here with the 81st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron for a nighttime combat mission. Mitchell is deployed from the 442nd Fighter Squadron, Mo.



An A-10 Thunderbolt II from the 81st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, taxis to a de-arm area here following a combat sortie.

erve

re and a
0 pilot is
a go.”
10 pilots
raft, the
igned for
upport.
re do back
ecution of
Mitchell, a
g back
ves us

A-10s,



Photos by Air Force Maj. David Kurler

(Above) Air Force Staff Sgt. Shannon Hughes, left, hands Air Force Senior Airman Damon Johnson a tool as they work on an A-10 Thunderbolt II during its phase inspection here Aug. 5. Both Airmen are deployed for Operation Enduring Freedom from the 52nd Fighter Wing at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany.

(Left) An A-10 deployed to the 455th Air Expeditionary Wing here from the 81st Fighter Squadron at Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, flies a combat sortie over Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

Bagram A-10s surge for summer offensives

By Air Force Maj.

David Kurle

455th Air Expeditionary Wing
public affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Six U.S. and Coalition troops peer out from a remote position on a ridge top in Afghanistan. At sunset on the third day of their vigil, a large force of Taliban extremists carrying heavy machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades surround and pin the team down.

By design, an Air Force joint tactical air controller is with the team. His job is to direct strike aircraft to targets on the ground. The situation on the ridge line is desperate until an Air Force pilot flying an A-10 Thunderbolt II in the vicinity contacts him.

Helping the A-10 pilot find and target his attackers on the ground, the JTAC stays in radio contact, except when forced to pick up his weapon and fire at the enemy closing in.

"Fifty minutes later the remaining enemy retreated and (the JTAC) and his team walked off that ridge to re-supply and fight again the next day," said Air Force Lt. Col. Keith McBride, commander of the 81st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron.

McBride, an A-10 pilot, uses this real-life story to illustrate his point that the A-10 is saving lives in Afghanistan.

"There have been numerous occasions where our troops have been taking heavy fire and we show up and either our presence ends the engagement or we employ against enemy positions and end the engagement," said Air Force Col. Tony Johnson, the 455th



Photo by Air Force Maj. David Kurle

Air Force Col. Tony Johnson, an A-10 pilot from the 442nd Fighter Wing, takes off in an A-10 Thunderbolt II.

Expeditionary Operations Group commander and an A-10 pilot himself.

Flying hours and the amount of bombs and bullets expended by A-10 pilots here have increased all summer due to two offensives by ground forces against the enemy. Operations Mountain Lion and Mountain Thrust flushed Taliban extremists out of where they normally hole-up, exposing them to U.S. and Coalition forces on the ground, who called on A-10 pilots to provide close air support.

"The increase in weapons deliveries is primarily because U.S. and Coalition operations have carried the fight to the extremists," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Christopher Miller, 455th Air Expeditionary Wing commander.

One of his jobs is to advise Army Maj. Gen. Benjamin Freakley, Combined Joint Task Force-76 commander, on the use of combat aircraft in Afghanistan.

"Where extremists have

attacked the Afghan people and their infrastructure, we have helped defend them, and we have carried the fight to the enemy, to push them back and reduce their ability to carry out further attacks," Miller said. "The whole A-10 team, from the Airmen who launch them, to the pilots who fly them, should be proud. They are saving the lives of Americans and many others they don't even know—and in the big picture, they're enabling the security Afghanistan needs to rebuild into a society where terrorists can't flourish."

The A-10's ability to precisely hit targets also lends itself well to U.S. forces engaged in re-building Afghanistan, Johnson said. Preservation of infrastructure and limiting damage on the ground are crucial, since the country of Afghanistan is not the enemy.

"We're also re-building a country," he said. "I don't know what other airplane would be better at this than

the A-10."

The A-10 was originally designed around its 30-mm gun, designated the GAU-8. The gun is more of a small artillery piece — firing huge bullets into target areas at a rate of 65 per second. The A-10 is the only Air Force aircraft designed specifically for close air support — providing firepower for ground troops in fights with enemy forces. If the gun isn't enough, 11 stations underneath the plane hold up to 16,000 pounds of bombs, missiles and rockets.

"Our weapons effects make a decisive impact on the battle," McBride said. "Ground forces rely on our rapid response and our pin-point accuracy."

The GAU-8, with its 8-foot, rifled barrels, delivers bullets at a blistering 3,000-feet-per-second. When pilots pull the trigger, they aim using the plane's computer, which takes into account factors like speed, altitude, the distance from the target and angle of

See SURGE, Page 11

SURGE, from Page 10

the plane's nose. This combination of physics and software make the 30-mm gun on the A-10 extremely accurate.

"Just the large amount and type of weapons the A-10 can carry, combined with a long loiter time over our troops on the ground, makes up for the lack of organic, heavy weapons (carried by U.S. and Coalition forces)," McBride said.

But it's not just the A-10's firepower that makes it an excellent choice for supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. The plane is designed rugged – much like the mountainous terrain of Afghanistan.

To enable twists and turns through low valleys and high peaks, the wings stick straight out, allowing small, sharp turns. It's heavily armored for the benefit of its pilots and is built to land and take off from the well-worn surface of Bagram's runway.

The A-10 combines some of the best of today's high-technology Air Force with a solid, low-tech foundation. The addition of a targeting and laser-designation pod was a huge boost to the plane's capabilities but still no substi-

tute for the pilot's eyeballs.

"Most other aircraft rely heavily on (electronic) sensors to find and target the enemy," said Air Force Capt. Rick Mitchell, an active-duty pilot deployed here from Reserve's 442nd Fighter Wing at Whiteman Air Force Base, Mo. "In the A-10, it's not unusual for a pilot to use binoculars."

When Mitchell flies, his preparation for the mission is extensive and can take more time than the actual combat sortie.

Once in the air, pilots can fly to pre-planned targets or fly in holding patterns above potential battlefields waiting to swoop down when ground forces encounter the enemy.

The Combined Air Operations Center, in Southwest Asia, generates missions for Bagram's A-10s. This high-tech command center runs air operations for both Afghanistan and Iraq.

"We work those guys pretty hard," said Royal Air Force Flight Lt. Matthew Adamson-Drage, a fighter controller who helps assign missions to the A-10s at the CAOC. "The A-10s are pretty much the backbone of (air operations in Afghanistan) because they're

flying all the time every day."

To keep the A-10 in fighting form and meet this summer's sweltering pace, the 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Group had to get creative to keep the aircraft ready for missions.

Airmen in the 455th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron, commanded by Air Force Maj. Tim Coger, work around the clock on two aircraft at a time in Bagram's A-10 "phase hangar." Every 400 flight-hours, an A-10 requires a thorough inspection of certain essential parts.

"We're flying off 400 hours here faster than we do at home station," Coger said. "The maintenance tempo is driven by the flying. Since the pilots are flying the jets more, it has caused us to do more maintenance."

And they're not just keeping aircraft flying. Maintainers also load the weapons A-10s need to support ground troops.

That's where Air Force Master Sgt. Dennis Peterson, from Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany, comes in. He is the 455th Expeditionary Aircraft Maintenance Squadron's chief weapons loader.

"It's been steady work ever since we touched down here,"

he said. "Rarely a day goes by when (the A-10s) don't come back empty. To see that airplane come back empty is the hallmark of being a weapons loader."

The load teams at Bagram keep a running score of the bombs, rockets and bullets used by A-10s since arriving here in May by posting the tallies on a mural painted next to the group's lounge to remind Airmen about the gravity of their mission.

"Our maintenance troops have performed magnificently," McBride said.

The sum of maintenance and flying efforts enables the A-10 to be an effective protector of U.S. and Coalition ground forces on the front lines against extremists whose goal is to drag Afghanistan back to the Taliban's repressive brutality and again let the country be used as a haven for terrorists.

"The A-10 is employing lethal firepower when it's needed most by troops on the ground," Mitchell said. "There's nothing more rewarding to a close air support pilot than knowing the firepower you employed just saved the lives of guys on the ground."



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

Three Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, salute memorials dedicated to three fallen Chosin brothers in arms during the memorial ceremony Aug. 15 at Camp Blessing.

Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro
Task Force Spartan public affairs

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to freedomwatch@baf.afgn.army.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

Air Force medic discovers more about himself during PRT mission

By Air Force Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.
455th Air Expeditionary Wing public affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE TARIN KOWT, Afghanistan — When a suicide bomber slammed and ignited his missile-laden vehicle into the Humvee in front of Staff Sgt. Eric Mathiasen, the Air Force medic exploded into action. He didn't think about his wife or two children, or that there were unexploded ordnance laying about, he just grabbed his medical bag and sprinted toward the blast area.

"While I was running to the wounded guy, I just hoped I could help him," Mathiasen said. "I just hoped I wouldn't screw anything up."

He questioned his abilities because before this deployment to Afghanistan, he admits he didn't have much experience treating trauma patients. At his home base at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Mathiasen is an aeromedical services craftsman.

Although he likes his job at Edwards, with two wars raging, he always felt he could do more to do his part. Twice before, he has volunteered to deploy -- one time outside his career field as a third-country national monitor.

Then, on the Air Force Personnel Center web site, he saw a volunteer opportunity with the provincial reconstruction team and signed up.

"The Air Force doesn't normally deploy its people for a year, and I wanted to say that I've deployed for a year," said the Tehachapi, Calif., native. "I thought I needed to prove something to myself, I guess."

As a medic with a PRT, he was also excited about working "outside the wire." When he volunteered, his wife supported his decision, despite the obvious danger involved with the PRT mission. He said she knew how important this was for him.

After weeks of training, he arrived here



Photo by Air Force Master Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Eric Mathiasen checks his gear during an unexpected down day after the team's scheduled convoy was cancelled.

in April and knew he had found what he had been looking for -- a chance to see what he was made of.

Quotes, hand-written by someone on a white board in the main office of the PRT, confirmed it. One said: "Danger gleams like sunshine to a brave man's eye," Euripides, 412 B.C.

Another said: "God has fixed the time of death. I do not concern myself with that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me -- that is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave," Stonewall Jackson, 1862.

One only has to walk outside to know there is an uncertain environment outside the confines of the base. Army helicopters -- some heavily armed, lethal gun ships and some MEDEVAC birds whose job is to save lives -- constantly thump the air around this remote outpost.

On the Fourth of July, airfield residents witnessed their own fireworks display when Operation Mountain Thrust brought the battle to the extremists in the foothills not far from here.

These PRT members don't drive thin-skinned vehicles like some teams in

Afghanistan. Instead, they deal with the threat by convoying everywhere in Humvees in order to do their mission of providing better security, economic stability and good governance in this region. They do this by convoying to schools, government offices and police stations.

Although he'd been with the team for a month, at the time he still felt he was waiting for something. That is, until the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device exploded May 1.

The medic was riding in a Humvee located in the middle of the convoy when a suicide bomber in a car crashed into the vehicle directly ahead of Mathiasen and detonated a cache of missile heads. The explosion ripped all the limbs from the extremist, but it didn't kill anybody in the Humvee.

As trained, Mathiasen jumped out of his vehicle to help provide security, but when he heard screams of "Medic!" "Medic!" he grabbed his medical bag and ran toward the blast area.

He avoided the two or three unexploded ordnance that lay littered on the road.

After determining that the Soldier in

See MEDIC, Page 13

U.S. Military prepares to host citizenship workshop

By Army Spc. James Tamez

19th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- Some of the U.S. service members fighting in support of the war on terror are not U.S. citizens. However, that will soon change.

U.S. military personnel are preparing to hold a U.S. citizenship workshop at the New Chapel here Sept. 8. This workshop is being made available to qualifying resident aliens in the military and also civilian contractors.

"The purpose is to have a one stop shop for the application process," said Army Capt. Patrick Woolsey, chief of client services, Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, Combined Joint Task Force 76. "By holding the workshop, we are providing everything needed to streamline the application process."

Instructions will be provided on the three forms necessary for the application process, Woolsey said. There is the G-325B, which is for biographical information, the United States

Citizenship and Immigration Services N-400, which is the application form for naturalization, and the USCIS N426, which is the request for certification of military service. The applicants need to have work and resident history for five years, and their green card or alien card.

The process is difficult, with confusion occurring over procedures and necessary forms. The OSJA wants to streamline it and assist as many people as possible, Woolsey said.

"Not everyone may be aware this program is available in theater," said Air Force Tech. Sgt. Tammy Karl, noncommissioned officer in charge of Client Services, CJTF-76. "We want to reach as many people as possible."

Many of the military members out there are not yet citizens of the United States, Karl said. This will help facilitate their dreams of becoming citizens.

"In addition to client services, support is being provided by military police with fingerprinting, and the Military



Photo by Army Spc. James Tamez

Army Capt. Patrick Woolsey reviews forms for the upcoming naturalization workshop.

Personnel Office is providing photographs during military certification," Woolsey said. "We have had phenomenal command support for the naturalization process."

Though the process is available primarily to military personnel, it is also available to civilian contractors who are resident aliens, Woolsey said.

"These people are fighting with us," Karl said. "They are physically out there, putting

their lives on the line, to become citizens. It is their right to attend the seminar."

For questions or additional information on the U.S. citizenship workshop, send an email to patrick.woolsey@afghan.swa.army.mil.

(Editor's note: The website www.uscis.gov is also available for additional information on the naturalization process, including information on the updated forms necessary to completing the process.)

MEDIC, from Page 12

the damaged Humvee hadn't sustained life-threatening wounds, Mathiasen turned his attention to a young child injured by the blast.

The medic cut the clothes from the boy and couldn't feel a pulse. All his wounds were internal. He was bleeding on the inside. Because the boy didn't have a pulse, he couldn't insert an IV.

If the little boy didn't receive immediate medical attention he would certainly die right there. An Afghan ambulance took the child to a nearby Afghan hospital.

Meanwhile, Mathiasen returned to treating his teammate.

"He was quite apprehensive about his condition and his brush with death, so I

didn't want to do any more to him than needed to be done," Mathiasen later wrote in a report. "I flushed his eyes to clear them of debris, and poured some water over his hands that suffered second-degree burns. He declined pain medication, so I worked to keep him calm and provide security at the same time."

The Soldier eventually made it to a military hospital for treatment. Mathiasen later learned that doctors tried to revive the boy by hand massaging his heart, but to no avail. He eventually died two weeks later.

After that dreadful incident, the medic felt he had bonded even more deeply with the team. He felt the team trusted him more, probably because he now

trusted himself. He proved to himself that he could perform his job under the most stressful life-and-death conditions.

And, now that he feels that he's part of the team, he feels the paternal need to protect them, like they protect him.

"I know these guys. They have kids and wives and mother and fathers waiting for them at home," he said. "If I can, in some small part, contribute in their making it back home, then that's why I'm here."

Here, in one of the most dangerous locations in Afghanistan, Mathiasen discovered two things that changed his life forever — confidence that he can do his job under pressure, and a mission that satisfies his yearning to contribute to the war in a meaningful way.



Photos by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Pintagro

Army Pfc. Jake Niedzwiecki, an infantryman with 1st Platoon, B Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan, from Grand Rapids, Mich., mans his weapon Aug. 4 at Bella Firebase, located in Nuristan Province.

Chosin troopers patrol northeastern frontier

**By Army Sgt. 1st Class
Michael Pintagro**

Task Force Spartan public affairs

JALALABAD AIRFIELD, Afghanistan -- The remote outpost American Soldiers share with Afghan National Army brethren overlooks the town of Aranas, built in a roughly columnar pattern directly into the side of the mountain. A steep grade that sometimes taxes the ingenuity of ascending and descending dogs and donkeys let alone men separates the troops from the town.

Army 1st Lt. Matt Gottschling and his men live near the crest of a mountain in the Waygal Valley of northeastern Afghanistan's Nuristan Province.

Gottschling leads the 1st Platoon of B Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan, a hardy group of Soldiers who rotate among mountain fasts, vehicle control points along rural Afghan roads and remote northeastern outposts.

The B Company Soldiers and members of Chosin Battalion man a string of small, but strategically significant, outposts along Afghanistan's eastern frontier. The forward posts allow allied Soldiers to operate from advantageous geographical

positions. They simultaneously deny anti-Afghan extremists use of the ground they occupy.

The rural outposts embody the philosophy of the battalion commander, who believes his Soldiers maximize their impact by living close to the people. Army Lt. Col. Chris Cavoli's subordinate leaders implement that vision on the ground.

"Our mission is to disrupt the enemy, to disrupt their movement through the Waygal and Pech valleys," said Gottschling, from Hilltown, Penn. Army Maj. Douglas E. Sloan, the B Co., 1-32 Inf. commander, added that the outposts "prevent the enemy from entering the Korengal and reaching the Pech Valley," pushing extremists away from major approaches into the northeastern heartland.

Sloan also pointed out that the outposts serve as bases for future endeavors in rural northeastern areas.

"Base camps in Aranas and nearby Bella serve as a jump-off point to establishing a greater presence in the north," said Bella, from Charlevoix, Mich. "They'll be winter outposts to protect the people of the region."

Soldiers manning the outposts, Sloan noted, will prevent the enemy from wintering in the area. "If we stay there, the enemy won't be able to. If they want to operate there, they'll have to leave and re-infiltrate in the spring."

High stakes loom in the effort to interdict extremist leaders attracted by the region's isolation, strategically daunting landscape and proximity to the Pakistani border. Since the inception of Operation Enduring Freedom terrorists have operated in the region.

"Geography is an enormous challenge," Gottschling said, noting peaks reach as high as 13,000 feet. "It looks a lot easier on a map. A short distance might be very difficult to cover on this terrain."

Gottschling said this is where terrorist leaders make their plans and hold meetings before they move into the Pech. Then they'll pick up caches on the way and attack the Soldiers.

The Bella facility serves as a key regional logistical hub and provides important fire support to battalion Soldiers throughout the Waygal Valley.

According to Army 1st Lt. Jesston Wagner, the leader of the platoon

See CHOSIN, Page 15

CHOSIN, from Page 14

assigned to Bella Firebase, the outpost “acts as a re-supply hub for supplies and equipment passing from Blessing to Aranas.”

The 24-year-old from Fort Rock, Ore. added that he and his men regularly contract donkey teams to push supplies deep into the Waygal.

Chosin mortarmen, infantrymen and fire supporters protect allied Soldiers and positions throughout the region from the firebase. Soldiers based at Bella occasionally conduct foot patrols. Together with embedded trainers and ANA colleagues, the Chosin infantrymen also conduct traffic check points.

Intensive construction projects, organized by leaders, managed by Coalition soldiers and aided by a company-sized force of Afghan employees, reshape and enhance the outposts by the day. Ambitious projects underway in Bella as well as Aranas promise to establish stronger, more secure facilities featuring better living conditions and more amenities.

“We’re doing our best to set up our position and set up our camp so we have a place to stage and conduct missions out of,” Gottschling said.

Soldiers and local workers in Bella work diligently to construct guard towers as well as billeting, storage and command and control facilities.

Chosin infantrymen spend periods ranging from weeks to months at their various camps, pausing briefly for “refit” between missions. The Soldiers enjoy their highest standard of living at such modest forward operating bases as FOB Asadabad and Camp Blessing; they live more often amid virtually unmitigated mountain wilderness.

Some Chosin troopers spend so much time in remote camps that isolation develops into a normal condition.

Army Spec. Min Kim, a communication specialist with Headquarters Company, 1-32 Inf., spent more than two months in the Pech Valley and another month manning an observation post on high ground near Camp Blessing prior to his arrival above Aranas.

“When I go back to the FOBs I feel kind of funny with all the people

around,” the 24-year-old from New York City said with a smile.

The Soldiers hunkered down above Aranas live in makeshift hovels constructed near their fighting positions. These “hooches” range in sophistication from bare ground covered by ponchos to elaborate structures comprised of pallets, plywood, tarps and sandbags as well as Army field gear. One enterprising Chosin Soldier constructed a fairly plush tree house; a handful of resourceful ANA warriors moved into cave-hooches.

Like their counterparts in Aranas, B Company Soldiers serving in Bella live where they work and fight.

“We sleep in our fighting positions,” said Army Pfc. Jake Niedzwiecki, a 27-year-old B Company infantryman from Grand Rapids, Mich.

Some Chosin troopers construct more or less permanent living spaces, noted Army Spec. Jeffrey LeVesque, a 24-year-old B Company infantryman from Buffalo, N.Y. “Other guys tear them down every day and rebuild them every night.”

“It’s better than the Pech,” Wagner said with a laugh. “We build makeshift hooches with pallets, plywood and a couple of tarps left over from air drops. It’s not ‘Home Improvement with Bob Villa,’ but it’s better than getting rained on every night.”

Chosin Soldiers serving in the Waygal Valley enjoy, at least, the consolation of a relatively mild climate. Rivers and creeks course through the valleys, while rain falls regularly on the mountains and passes.

“It’s wetter and cooler,” Wagner said of his Bella base, adding that nearby mountains also obstruct the withering glare of the Afghan sun during part of the day.

The relatively temperate Nuristani climate creates challenges as well as opportunities. Frequent rains force Soldiers to devote more time and energy to constructing and maintaining shelters. They also create quantities of mud greater than those found in arid regions of the country. The mud bogs down transportation efforts and renders the already challenging task of maintaining some modicum of cleanliness without running water or artificial bathing facilities even more daunting for Soldiers.

Allied Soldiers confront the hygiene challenges posed by their primitive living conditions in resourceful ways. At Bella, Chosin troopers bathe in calm stretches of the Waygal. Allied Soldiers stationed above Aranas, meanwhile, rely on water piped in from a mountain spring for washing.

Soldiers’ diets consist mainly of meals, ready to eat supplemented by Afghan fare provided by their ANA colleagues, interpreters and the numerous Afghan laborers who work on outpost construction projects. The American Soldiers enjoy regular rations of rice, bread and beans; more rarely, they devour goat or chicken meat, fresh fruits or diced potatoes. At Bella, locals provide fried bread and “chai” every morning. Counterparts above Aranas blend rice prepared by ANA Soldiers and interpreters with MREs.

“We buy food from the village, mainly rice and beans,” explained Army Sgt. Allen Lewis, a 22-year-old B Company infantryman from Barre, Vt. “We get the ‘terps’ and the ANA to cook it for us. It makes a pretty good meal mixed with an MRE.”

Serving together in remote, isolated outposts far from home – ANA Soldiers too represent a national body drawn from regions throughout their country – allied Soldiers form close and complex bonds. Soldiers share cultural as well as culinary tidbits.

Pashtun and Dari as well as Nuristani radio broadcasts resonate throughout ANA areas of the camps. English-language publications, meanwhile, circulate around the outposts. Allied Soldiers learn each others’ card games, habits and manners. The Soldiers converse through interpreters and incorporate counterparts’ expressions – some of them clean – into their lexicon. Heavily accented attempts at contemporary American slang and Pashtun greetings resound daily throughout the camps.

“They come visit with us every day,” Niedzwiecki said of his ANA colleagues. “Sometimes we’ll talk through the ‘terps.’ Sometimes we’ll try to talk with gestures and signals.”

“We travel in their culture and they travel in ours,” Lewis said.

Freedom Watch

August 28, 2006



“The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike him as hard as you can, and keep moving on.”

-Ulysses S. Grant

Army Spec. Alfredo Abrenica, a mortarmen with Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, Task Force Spartan, and Army Pvt. Leslie Garcia, also a mortarmen with HHC, 1-32 Inf., prepare for a fire mission Aug. 4 at Bella Firebase, located in Nuristan Province. Photo by Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael Piniagro, Task Force Spartan public affairs